



Jill Castellano &lt;jillcastellano@inewsource.org&gt;

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## Journalist writing about "unethical" Nature article

12 messages

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Jill Castellano <jillcastellano@inewsource.org>  
To: press@nature.com

Tue, Jun 18, 2019 at 12:42 PM

Hello,

My name is Jill Castellano and I'm a journalist in San Diego with [inewsource](#). I'm reaching out because in an article I'm working on, I'm going to be writing about the attached study by Liu et al that was published in Nature in 2016 about lens regeneration in infants.

Shortly after the study was published, ophthalmologists asked Nature to retract the study because it was unethical and contained false conclusions. A quick summary of some of their points: The experimental treatment was conducted on infants in both their eyes rather than just one, creating the possibility that the treatment could blind the patients if something went wrong. Plus, the picture evidence provided in the study clearly shows that no lens was regenerated by the treatment, even though the authors concluded there was lens regeneration.

Instead of retracting the article, Nature published two letters to the editor (also attached here), but they weren't published until two years after the original paper. Ophthalmologists I've spoken with allege that Nature intentionally delayed publication of the letters and refused to retract the article because the journal was more concerned about its reputation than about the safety and integrity of research studies.

I am hoping to speak with someone at Nature about these claims and give your journal an opportunity to address them. I'd like to know if Nature ever conducted an investigation or review of this study after receiving these complaints, and why it took two years to publish the response letters.

I'm also interested in how these studies are reviewed prior to publication -- how many layers of review they go through and how thorough the reviews are. The ophthalmologists claim these issues should have been caught before the paper was ever published.

My deadline is end of the day Friday. You can reach me at 914-629-1750.

Thanks for your help.

Best,  
Jill Castellano

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Jill Castellano  
Investigative Data Reporter, *inewsource*  
Email: [jillcastellano@inewsource.org](mailto:jillcastellano@inewsource.org)  
Phone: (914) 629-1750  
Twitter: [@jill\\_castellano](#)  
PGP: [Public Key](#)



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### 2 attachments

**Liu\_et\_al\_reply (2).pdf**  
219K

**zhang lens nature17181 (1).pdf**  
3137K

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Press <Press@nature.com>

Tue, Jun 18, 2019 at 2:43 PM

To: Jill Castellano <jillcastellano@inewsource.org>  
Cc: Press <Press@nature.com>

Thanks for your email, Jill. Someone from the London press office will respond during UK business hours tomorrow.

All the best,  
Sarah

[Quoted text hidden]

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**Jill Castellano** <jillcastellano@inewsource.org>  
To: Press <Press@nature.com>  
Cc: Press <Press@nature.com>

Tue, Jun 18, 2019 at 2:58 PM

Thanks very much.

Best,  
Jill Castellano  
[Quoted text hidden]

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**Lisa Boucher** <l.boucher@nature.com>  
To: "jillcastellano@inewsource.org" <jillcastellano@inewsource.org>

Fri, Jun 21, 2019 at 8:46 AM

Dear Jill,

I just wanted to let you know that we are working on getting a response for you, and hope to get back to you later today.

Kind regards,

Lisa Boucher

Press Manager, Nature Research

**Springer Nature**

4 Crinan Street, London, N1 9XW

T: +44 20 7843 4804

E: [l.boucher@nature.com](mailto:l.boucher@nature.com)

[www.nature.com](http://www.nature.com) | [@Nature](#)

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**From:** Jill Castellano <jillcastellano@inewsource.org>  
**Date:** Tuesday, June 18, 2019 at 3:42 PM  
**To:** Press <Press@nature.com>  
**Subject:** Journalist writing about "unethical" Nature article

Hello,

[Quoted text hidden]

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Please note that Springer Nature Limited and their agents and affiliates do not accept any responsibility for viruses or malware that may be contained in this e-mail or its attachments and it is your responsibility to scan the e-mail and attachments (if any).

**Lisa Boucher** <l.boucher@nature.com>

Fri, Jun 21, 2019 at 12:31 PM

To: "jillcastellano@inewsource.org" <jillcastellano@inewsource.org>

Dear Jill,

Thank you for your patience. The following can be attributed to a spokesperson from Nature:

"When critiques are made about papers we have published, we look into them carefully following an established process. It is important that all material is scrutinised by experts in the field — the process of peer review — before any conclusions are drawn and any comments made. In this case, the two Brief Communications Arising (BCAs) and Reply were peer reviewed by independent referees with appropriate technical expertise to evaluate the submissions.

More generally, Brief Communications Arising submissions (now named "Matters Arising") that meet Nature's initial selection criteria are sent to the authors of the original paper for a formal response. Matters Arising and the original authors' formal response may then be sent to independent referees for peer review. The editors will decide how to proceed on the basis of the importance and timeliness of the contribution to the community. As with primary research papers, Matters Arising articles and their accompanying Replies, can undergo multiple rounds of revision and review.

Decisions about whether and how to update the scientific record are made by the editors, sometimes with the help of advice from independent peer reviewers. In this case, we have published a correction two BCAs and a Reply by the original authors in order to update the literature to include the matters raised and the original authors' response.

Regarding the editorial and peer-review process, all papers submitted to Nature are considered on the basis of scientific significance, and each published paper undergoes rigorous peer review. All submitted manuscripts are read by the editorial staff, and those manuscripts judged to be of potential interest to our readership are sent for formal peer review, typically to two or three reviewers (although sometimes more if special advice is needed). The editors then make a decision with the help of the reviewers' advice. All research papers published in Nature go through at least one round of review, usually two or three, and sometimes more. For confidentiality reasons, we cannot discuss specific cases."

Kind regards,

Lisa Boucher  
Press Manager, Nature Research  
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4 Crinan Street, London, N1 9XW  
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E: [l.boucher@nature.com](mailto:l.boucher@nature.com)<<mailto:l.boucher@nature.com>>  
[www.nature.com](http://www.nature.com)<<http://www.nature.com>> | @Nature<<https://twitter.com/nature>>

From: Jill Castellano <[jillcastellano@inewsource.org](mailto:jillcastellano@inewsource.org)<<mailto:jillcastellano@inewsource.org>>>

Date: Tuesday, June 18, 2019 at 3:42 PM

To: Press <[Press@nature.com](mailto:Press@nature.com)<<mailto:Press@nature.com>>>

Subject: Journalist writing about "unethical" Nature article

Hello,

My name is Jill Castellano and I'm a journalist in San Diego with inewsource<[https://urldefense.proofpoint.com/v2/url?u=https-3A\\_\\_inewsource.org\\_-&d=DwMFaQ&c=vh6FgFnduejNhPPD0fl\\_yRaSfZy8CWbWnlf4XJhSqx8&r=XQh9qBHJsJPp4G4a5cNa-g&m=\\_x6T2q7zkXDBFI7kVCtNyih1KaM3Qvsl-DTuEnFvSM&s=ZUb9AQzE2u0Y4xIhFT1v1QLc6MynndqORYkcdbMpOrY&e=>](https://urldefense.proofpoint.com/v2/url?u=https-3A__inewsource.org_-&d=DwMFaQ&c=vh6FgFnduejNhPPD0fl_yRaSfZy8CWbWnlf4XJhSqx8&r=XQh9qBHJsJPp4G4a5cNa-g&m=_x6T2q7zkXDBFI7kVCtNyih1KaM3Qvsl-DTuEnFvSM&s=ZUb9AQzE2u0Y4xIhFT1v1QLc6MynndqORYkcdbMpOrY&e=>)>. I'm reaching out because in an article I'm working on, I'm going to be writing about the attached study by Liu et al that was published in Nature in 2016 about lens regeneration in infants.

Shortly after the study was published, ophthalmologists asked Nature to retract the study because it was unethical and contained false conclusions. A quick summary of some of their points: The experimental treatment was conducted on infants in both their eyes rather than just one, creating the possibility that the treatment could blind the patients if something went wrong. Plus, the picture evidence provided in the study clearly shows that no lens was regenerated by the treatment, even though the authors concluded there was lens regeneration.

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I am hoping to speak with someone at Nature about these claims and give your journal an opportunity to address them. I'd like to know if Nature ever conducted an investigation or review of this study after receiving these complaints, and why it took two years to publish the response letters.

I'm also interested in how these studies are reviewed prior to publication -- how many layers of review they go through and how thorough the reviews are. The ophthalmologists claim these issues should have been caught before the paper was ever published.

My deadline is end of the day Friday. You can reach me at 914-629-1750.

Thanks for your help.

Best,  
Jill Castellano

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Jill Castellano

Investigative Data Reporter, inewsource

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PGP: Public Key <[https://urldefense.proofpoint.com/v2/url?u=https-3A\\_\\_pgp.mit.edu\\_pks\\_lookup-3Fop-3Dget-26search-3D0xE1BFFFD70EC25BA&d=DwMFaQ&c=vh6FgFnduejNhPPD0fl\\_yRaSfZy8CWbWnlf4XJhSqx8&r=XQh9qBHJsJPp4G4a5cNa-g&m=\\_x6T2q7zkXDBFI7kVCtNyiha1KaM3Qvsl-DTuEnFvSM&s=mU610C4COQeg4Wn98Rbz4lbv\\_VRC7\\_\\_V1CJuHw41DBA&e=>](https://urldefense.proofpoint.com/v2/url?u=https-3A__pgp.mit.edu_pks_lookup-3Fop-3Dget-26search-3D0xE1BFFFD70EC25BA&d=DwMFaQ&c=vh6FgFnduejNhPPD0fl_yRaSfZy8CWbWnlf4XJhSqx8&r=XQh9qBHJsJPp4G4a5cNa-g&m=_x6T2q7zkXDBFI7kVCtNyiha1KaM3Qvsl-DTuEnFvSM&s=mU610C4COQeg4Wn98Rbz4lbv_VRC7__V1CJuHw41DBA&e=>)

[[https://docs.google.com/uc?export=download&id=1IdrYT96umM5-QGPc\\_RhshGgfpWrpGW-l&revid=0B42\\_nqcy7acUVXkxWm5CemNzQ1E1WjZaengrRFVONExQOURBPQ](https://docs.google.com/uc?export=download&id=1IdrYT96umM5-QGPc_RhshGgfpWrpGW-l&revid=0B42_nqcy7acUVXkxWm5CemNzQ1E1WjZaengrRFVONExQOURBPQ)]

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**Jill Castellano** <[jillcastellano@inewsource.org](mailto:jillcastellano@inewsource.org)>  
To: Brad Racino <[bradracino@inewsource.org](mailto:bradracino@inewsource.org)>

Tue, Jun 25, 2019 at 9:25 AM

Response from Nature

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**Jill Castellano** <[jillcastellano@inewsource.org](mailto:jillcastellano@inewsource.org)>  
To: Lisa Boucher <[l.boucher@nature.com](mailto:l.boucher@nature.com)>

Mon, Jul 8, 2019 at 1:52 PM

Hi Lisa,

Thanks again for your help with my earlier questions. I had another thing I wanted to ask you about: Does Nature have any kind of training or mentorship program for peer reviewers to ensure they properly understand how to review articles? I would appreciate a response as soon as you're able, and by Thursday at the latest.

Sincerely,  
Jill Castellano  
[Quoted text hidden]  
[Quoted text hidden]



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**Jill Castellano** <jillcastellano@inewsource.org>  
To: Press <press@nature.com>

Mon, Jul 8, 2019 at 1:53 PM

Hello,

I received an out-of-office note from Lisa, so I'm forwarding my question to the general press email address. Please let me know if you can be of assistance.

Thanks!

Jill Castellano

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**Bex Walton** <r.walton@nature.com>  
To: "jillcastellano@inewsource.org" <jillcastellano@inewsource.org>  
Cc: Lisa Boucher <l.boucher@nature.com>

Tue, Jul 9, 2019 at 3:14 AM

Hi Jill,

Thanks for your email. I hope the following information will be of use – as before, please attribute any quotes to a *Nature* spokesperson.

We provide clear and detailed instructions to peer reviewers when they agree to review a manuscript. Detailed guidelines about the review process for peer reviewers for Nature Research are outlined on our website at <https://www.nature.com/nature-research/editorial-policies/peer-review>.

We also have a selection of resources for peer reviewers on the Springer Nature website at <https://www.springernature.com/gp/reviewers>. For example, through Nature Masterclasses, we have a free online course that provides an overview of the peer-review process and offers practical tips for peer reviewers. The course is freely available here: <https://masterclasses.nature.com/online-course-on-peer-review/16507836>

Best wishes,

Bex

**Rebecca Walton**

Head of Communications, Journals & Editorial

**SpringerNature**

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**From:** Press <[Press@nature.com](mailto:Press@nature.com)>

**Sent:** 09 July 2019 10:59

**To:** Bex Walton <[r.walton@nature.com](mailto:r.walton@nature.com)>; Lisa Boucher <[l.boucher@nature.com](mailto:l.boucher@nature.com)>

**Subject:** FW: Journalist writing about "unethical" Nature article

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Jill Castellano

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PGP: [Public Key](#)



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**Jill Castellano** <[jillcastellano@inewssource.org](mailto:jillcastellano@inewssource.org)>

To: Bex Walton <[r.walton@nature.com](mailto:r.walton@nature.com)>

Cc: Lisa Boucher <[l.boucher@nature.com](mailto:l.boucher@nature.com)>

Mon, Jul 15, 2019 at 12:00 PM

Thanks so much! As a quick follow-up question, is it correct to say that *Nature* provides guidelines and resources for peer reviewers but does not mandate training for peer reviewers?

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**Jill Castellano** <jillcastellano@inewsource.org>  
To: Bex Walton <r.walton@nature.com>  
Cc: Lisa Boucher <l.boucher@nature.com>

Tue, Jul 16, 2019 at 2:20 PM

Hello again,

In addition to my last question I'm still hoping for an answer on, here is one more thing I wanted to confirm as well. Is it correct to say that *Nature* typically does not do its own ethical reviews of studies before publishing them. Instead, *Nature* — like other scientific journals — requires studies to be approved in advance by review boards, which serves as a guarantee that the researchers protected the rights of the participants.

From your understanding, is that accurate? I am hoping to hear back by the end of the day tomorrow (Wednesday) in response to both questions.

Thanks very much,  
Jill Castellano

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[Quoted text hidden]



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**Bex Walton** <r.walton@nature.com>  
To: Jill Castellano <jillcastellano@inewsource.org>  
Cc: Lisa Boucher <l.boucher@nature.com>

Wed, Jul 17, 2019 at 7:59 AM

Hello Jill,

Thanks for your email.

In response to your most recent questions:

It is correct that *Nature* provides extensive guidelines and resources for peer reviewers but does not mandate training for peer reviewers. Peer review is a central tenet of the scientific process, widely recognised as a fundamental responsibility of academics to support the furtherance of scientific endeavour and regularly undertaken by experienced researchers, who themselves benefit from other academics undertaking reviews of their own work. Peer review provides an independent assessment of the importance and technical accuracy of the results described, and feedback from referees conveyed to authors with the editors' advice frequently results in manuscripts being refined so that their structure and logic is more readily apparent to readers.

*Nature's* professional editors — a team of highly trained editors with strong research backgrounds — have significant experience of identifying qualified and capable academics to act as referees on papers and of assessing the reviews that they produce. Peer reviewers' reports are carefully considered by as part of the editors' evaluation of manuscripts submitted to the journal. All research papers published in *Nature* go through at least one round of review, usually two or three, and sometimes more. At each stage, the editors will discuss the manuscript in the light of referees' reports, having evaluated the strength of the arguments raised by each reviewer and by the authors; they may also consider other information not available to either party.

Ensuring that research published in the Nature Research journals has been conducted to a high ethical standard and reported transparently is of fundamental importance. All authors of papers in the life sciences [complete a checklist](#) to verify their compliance with our editorial policies. For research involving human participants, authors must identify the committee approving the research, and must include with their submission a statement confirming that informed

consent was obtained from all participants. When appropriate, ethical and regulatory advice is sought in parallel with the scientific peer review process.

Our policies relating to studies involving animals and human research participants can be found here:

<http://www.nature.com/authors/policies/experimental.html>

We also note your question regarding the time taken between the publication of the paper and the publication of the Brief Communications Arising and the original authors' Reply. Ensuring that the scientific record is accurate is always our highest priority and we will update the literature when appropriate. We take all concerns raised about papers we publish seriously and look into them carefully. It is important that all material is scrutinised by experts in the field — the process of peer review — before any conclusions are drawn and any comments made. These issues are often complex and as a result, it can take time for editors, authors and other concerned parties to fully unravel them. Where needed, we make updates as quickly as we can, but we will not do so before we have fully investigated to ensure that we are confident that the most appropriate course of action is followed.

Best wishes,

Bex

**Rebecca Walton**

Head of Communications, Journals & Editorial

**SpringerNature**

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